

2 Samuel 12:1-6  
Mark 4:33-34

**Tell Me A Story**  
Pastor Dennis Plourde

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I almost hesitate to ask this. How many of you can remember last week message? Now many of you were not here so you are excused. (One person remembered the title: “Why? Why? Why?”)

We have a clergy friend who was accused of preaching the same sermon twice. Now he was positive that he had not and the person who accused him was positive he had. They were both right! He keeps exceptional records and was able to go back over a few years of sermons and he discovered that he was correct, he had not preached the same sermon twice. However, he had repeated the same illustration/told the same story! The illustration was appropriate for both messages although the messages were entirely different. The person could not remember the sermon but did remember the story!

We are told in Mark’s Gospel that Jesus taught by using parables/stories. We know how we often remember the story. If we grew up in Sunday School we heard over and over again the stories of Biblical characters. They gave us an image of our faith. They told of how God moved through the history of Israel and how Jesus walked in our midst. We may not remember the point of the story but we remember the story.

We like stories. They are how we learn. They help us to paint images of the past and bring events to life. I remember how disappointed I was when I went from third to fourth grade in school. Now I was not disappointed that I had passed! I was disappointed because the fourth grade books no longer had pictures in them. The third grade books still had pictures. I had not yet learned how my imagination would take the place of pictures. I longed for the pictures that help tell, paint the story.

Our illustration today comes from 2 Samuel. David has sent his army off to war and he has stayed home in Jerusalem. *“In the spring, at the time when kings go off to war, David sent Joab out with the king’s men and the whole Israelite army” (11:1).* Alone one hot night David goes up to the roof top and looks over the city. A few rooftops away a beautiful woman, Bathsheba, is taking a bath. Now one thing leads to another and Bathsheba becomes pregnant with David’s child. There is only one thing for David to do. He brings her husband, Uriah, back from the battlefield and sends him home. However, Uriah refuses to go home. As long as his men are in the field, at war, he will not go to his house. After several attempts to get him to go home, David returns Uriah to the battlefield. He also sends instructions for Uriah to be placed in the front lines, in the heat of battle. When the battle is fully engaged the men are to draw away from Uriah. The plan goes according to David’s design; Uriah is killed and after an appropriate time of mourning he takes Bathsheba for his wife.

Nathan is called upon to confront David with his sin. How do you confront a King? You tell him a story. Nathan’s story is powerful. There is a man who had taken a ewe lamb and raised it as his own child. It has grown up with his children.

He has held it in his bosom and nourished it. The NRSV records it this way: *“but the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb, which he had bought. He brought it up, and it grew up with him and his children; it used to eat of his meager fare, and drink from his cup, and lie in his bosom, and it was like a daughter to him”* (12:3). Doesn't that tug at your heart strings? His rich neighbor has a friend visit and rather than take a lamb from his extensive flock he takes the ewe lamb from his poor neighbor. The story does what was intended. It angers David; he demands justice be done to this poor man. Who could imagine such a travesty? Now comes the judgment, verse seven: *“You are the man!”* Nathan took a chance, he told a story. Would David have heard Nathan out had he simply confronted David with his sin?

I listened to both Democratic candidates on Tuesday night. I noted that both told stories to bring home their point. Both had dramatic stories of people who supported them and their cause. It was the power of the story that touched the heart.

Stories are an important part of who we are. Now, I know I am repeating what I have said before! But stories are, in many ways, the fabric of our faith. Parables are stories that speak to the heart and the situation. They come out of common experiences and everyone who heard Jesus knew the images he was speaking about. They knew how a sower sowed the fields. They knew how a shepherd carried home the lost sheep. They knew the power of a mustard seed. They had lost something and spent hours looking for it. Everyone could relate to the stories that were told. I am not sure that is true today. We come from such varied and different backgrounds.

Now I could tell you the story of the dumbest sheep in northern Scotland. We were at Land's End and were stretching our legs after a day of traveling. We were walking on a cliff looking out over the North Sea. There was an antennae that had guy wires to keep it from falling in the almost constant wind. And, there was a sheep caught in two of the wires. Now all the sheep had to do was back up and it would out of the mess. I am told that sheep don't back up and so this one kept trying to go forward, bleating loudly, very loudly, attracting a crowd of onlookers. One man who came upon the scene was familiar with sheep and after considerable effort got the sheep free. As soon as it was free it walked around and got caught again! Some of you can picture this perfectly. You know the oft barren landscape of northern Scotland and the stupidity of sheep. For others you are trying but...

It was in the Philippines that the story of Ruth came to life for me. We met several women who were gleaning in a rice field. After a day of gleaning we were able to observe them winnowing the rice. They had gleaned all day for a few meager cups of rice. Ruth suddenly came alive and the labor she put into gleaning in the fields. I had seen the images of Ruth's story come alive.

Maybe you are growing tired of this point. But, it is one that we must learn over and over. We need stories. We need to know the stories of our heritage, our faith. We must know how to use stories to make our point.

This past year I read a wonderful fictional series, the Mitford Chronicles. It is the story of an Episcopal priest and his North Carolina parish. He is called on to conduct the funeral of the town storyteller. This man had to have the proper story/joke for every occasion. Over the years he had delighted them at various occasions in the town and the church. As they gathered at the graveside the rector asked if anyone wanted to share their favorite story. Not only share the story but also the occasion when it was told. The stories began slowly; a funeral is not the place for such. But as those gathered began hearing the stories, remembering the occasion, more and more shared. It became a celebration of his life – telling his stories. Laughter and tears filled the air—they remembered more than his life they remember their own.

If Jesus taught in stories... Jesus demonstrated to us the importance of story telling. They are the hooks on which we place our hats and coats. They are images that remind of certain truths or events. Stories are a powerful tool in our evangelism. We need more stories of faith, hope and courage. Stories are difficult. Maybe this is why we don't hear them as often as we should. We have few common experiences from which to draw. It is becoming harder and harder to teach in parables, but that is no excuse for not doing so.

We also need to note that the parables were seldom finished. We do not know the outcome. We are fortunate with Nathan and David that we know how the story ended, but most of the ones Jesus used we are only left to wonder. The final decision is always left to the one who heard the story.

I remember hearing of a Bible translator who had spent months and months trying to find a word or phrase that could be used for the Holy Spirit in the language of the tribe he was working with. Finally, one evening as stories were being told he found his word. They were telling of a member of the hunting party who was injured and of the one who stayed behind and made sure the injured member got back to the tribe safely. They had a word for this person, the one who stays behind. He now had a word for the Holy Spirit, an image on which to hang their hat: One who walks beside. The power of the story.